

Re-prioritizing Recruit Training
EWS Contemporary Issue Paper

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The Marine Corps' entry-level training is failing to meet the challenge of producing a basically trained Marine rifleman. The combination of mis-prioritized training objectives and the failure to define a basic Marine rifleman has lessened the impact that recruit training is having on the Marine Corps and its ability to influence the battlefield of the future. The Marine Corps needs to re-evaluate the process by which it trains recruits and how its raw recruits becomes a basic Marine rifleman.

Mis-Prioritized Training Objectives

Over the course of twelve weeks, a recruit must learn to drill, fire a rifle, conduct basic field skills, comprehend Marine Corps history, conduct basic first aid, pass swim qualification, and earn a tan belt in the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program. With so much to learn in such a short period, certain subjects must be given priority. Training is prioritized by the Commanding General of the Recruit Depot and is further refined by the Recruit Training Regiment. However, an overemphasis on close order drill, failure to instruct values based training at all levels, inaccurate method of tracking measures of effectiveness, and physical fitness education have been mis-prioritized and this valuable training time misused.

Recruits are thus rushed through the training pipeline, all while focusing on the wrong training objectives.

Drill!

When a Drill Instructor (DI) is asked what the most important aspect of recruit training is, the answer is usually drill. This common misconception is reinforced by the fact that two trophies exist for the Conduct of Drill Evaluation and yet only one trophy exists for the Physical Fitness Test. The Recruit Training Order (RTO) states that:

The objective of recruit training is to produce a basically trained Marine who possesses and has demonstrated mastery of the following areas: Discipline, Military Bearing, Esprit de Corps, Character Development, Marine Corps Common Combat Skills (MCCCS), and Physical Fitness.¹

The RTO references drill as a sub-set of MCCCS, not the center of gravity for recruit training. Drill instills of discipline and instant obedience to orders for recruits in the initial weeks of recruit training, but it should not become the sole focus of a platoon's DI. Many DIs sacrifice real-world training to win a trophy. 42 hours of the training schedule are dedicated to Conduct of Drill periods. This does not include Senior Drill Instructor (SDI) time or movement time is spent re-mediating drill techniques. This is equal to roughly half of

¹U.S. Marine Corps, Depot Order 1513.6A: Recruit Training Order, 5 December 2005.

the allotted time spent on the teaching of Tables I and II of Introductory Marksmanship. A more balanced training schedule needs to be developed that focuses less on archaic close order drill movements and more on the current operating environment.

Values Based Training

Over the years, Marines have epitomized, through their actions on the battlefield, honor, courage, and commitment. However, recent high visibility incidents in Haditha and here at home have driven Marine Corps leaders rethink their priorities for indoctrinating recruits. Again, the Recruit Depots are falling far short of prioritizing training for all of those involved in training recruits. Currently, only officers and SDIs are teaching the Marine Corps core values. During a recruit's 12 weeks aboard the Recruit Depot, recruits receive 26 hours each of core values instruction from their officers and 48 hours of core values training from their SDI.²

On the surface, this amount of training may seem to meet the requirements set forth by the Commandant, but in reality it fails to indoctrinate recruits with Marine Corps' core values of honor, courage, and commitment. By not allowing our green-belt

² U.S. Marine Corps, Recruit Training Schedule, *Company F, 2D Recruit Training Battalion*, 2008. (Marine Corps Recruit Depot, SC: 2008) 1.

DIs to instruct core values classes, the Marine Corps is missing out on getting their message to every recruit on every occasion possible. Only those who have attended recruit training can truly understand the bond that develops between a recruit and his or her green-belt DI. By capitalizing on this bond, the Marine Corps would exponentially reinforce its core values to Marines when they are most impressionable and have a greater long-term impact on the Marine Corps moral well-being.

Measuring Effectiveness

One of the most challenging aspects of recruit training is measuring its effectiveness. How do the Depots determine if they are training recruits effectively? Currently, recruit training companies are evaluated in six areas: Initial Drill, Combat Water Survival, Entry-Level Marksmanship, the Final Physical Fitness Test, Academic Testing, and Final Drill. Each area has its own test and is evaluated in terms of right or wrong, pass or fail. However, a closer look reveals that much of the material is regurgitated upon command. If recruits are asked what his general orders are, he will know them by heart. But if he is asked to describe a scenario where those general orders would apply, he would most likely draw a blank. The Depot standard of evaluating knowledge does not create an understanding of practical application. There needs to be a

synthesis between memorization and application. The standard and the testing method need to change.

If recruits cannot apply memorized information, then the act of memorization does not serve its intended purpose. Simply having recruits scream knowledge without properly explaining the purpose or logic behind the information is counterproductive. A change needs to be implemented in how recruit training companies are evaluated to determine whether or not recruits are effectively transitioning from raw civilians into basically trained Marine rifleman who will be able to apply their knowledge.

Physical Fitness

The third deficiency during entry-level training is the physical fitness program. Currently, recruits receive a total of 57 hours of physical training. Of this amount, recruits conduct 44.8% during the first 25 training days, 27.6% during the next 21 training days, and 27.6% during the final 24 training days.³ Many of the physical training hours later in the Program of Instruction (POI) are absorbed by conditioning hikes that skew the physical fitness training hours and would better be used to conduct training more geared towards combat

³ Recruit Training Schedule, Company F, 2D Recruit Training Battalion

endurance such as a second Combat Conditioning Course.

The current physical fitness curriculum needs to be spread more evenly across the entire POI and rely less on conditioning hikes and more on developing a base-line of physical fitness that will better prepare recruits for the rigors of follow-on training. By spreading the PT program more evenly across the POI; the risk of injury and over training is reduced. This would allow for more balanced weight-loss, and a formal education on continuing physical training (PT) beyond graduation being implemented into the POI. This will help ingrain recruits with a positive image of PT that will lead to more physically prepared Marines for follow-on training.

Over the last three years, the PT program at Recruit Depots has shifted towards more combat conditioning, but it is not enough. Many leaders focus on "old school" PT that centers on running 3-miles while singing cadence, mis-prioritizing training objectives based on their personal beliefs instead of changing with the times. The Marine Corps must strengthen recruits bodies through their minds by providing proper conditioning programs to continue their physical development once they have left recruit training.

Basic Marine vs. Basically Trained Marine Rifleman

The other major area where recruit training is failing

is in defining what type of Marine is walking across the parade deck at graduation: a basically trained Marine or a basically trained Marine rifleman. The Marine Corps has long stated that every Marine is a rifleman; therefore, every Marine that graduates recruit training should be trained as a basic Marine rifleman. The DI pledge states that:

These recruits are entrusted to my care. I will train them to the best of my ability. I will develop them into smartly disciplined, physically fit, basically trained Marines, thoroughly indoctrinated in love of Corps and country. I will demand of them, and demonstrate by my own example, the highest standards of personal conduct, morality, and professional skill.⁴

During forming, all SDIs inform their recruits that they are charged with training each recruit to be a basically trained Marine. However, all Marines take pride in the fact that when they become Marines they are becoming rifleman.

The mission statement of the Recruit Training Regiment does not define or make reference to a basically trained recruit or rifleman, instead, it references core values as the centerpiece of its mission. Both a basically trained Marine and basically trained Marine rifleman automatically include the Marine Corps' core values as the bedrock of what the Marine Corps is as an organization.

⁴U.S. Marine Corps, DepO P1513.6A, *DI Pledge*, 5 December 2005, URL: <http://www.mcrdpi.usmc.mil/units/rtr/battalions/dischool/pledge.asp>, accessed 1 November 2008

Given this confusing mission statement, the Marine Corps also needs to evaluate how it conducts entry-level marksmanship. Marksmanship training begins, for enlisted Marines, at either Recruit Depot on the Known Distance Course. Like the rest of recruit training, the rifle range also has a trophy that drives recruits and DIs alike to seek perfection and victory over other platoons in the company. The current POI calls for approximately 100 hours of marksmanship training for both Tables I and II in order to graduate training. Despite being allotted a substantial amount of time in the POI, marksmanship training is seen as secondary to moving recruits through recruit training onward to the School of Infantry. Currently, a recruit training company can expect approximately 18% of its recruits to go unqualified on Entry Level Marksmanship. More focus is placed on getting those 18% of recruits to qualify than ensuring that they truly understand the basic fundamentals of marksmanship.⁵ Recruits are given up to five more days, which is equal to seven extra times to qualify, of firing to qualify on Table I before being recycled to another training company.

Allowing recruits to qualify on their eighth attempt has become a common occurrence in recruit training. In order for

⁵ U.S. Marine Corps, Regimental Bulletin 1650.17C , *Regimental Awards Bulletin*, 1
November 2006,

recruit training to better support the philosophy that every Marine is a rifleman, the Marine Corps should graduate basic Marine riflemen, not basic Marines. The rifle range instruction needs to be refocused on a deeper understanding of the fundamentals of marksmanship and expanded to better enforce life-long skills.

Conclusion

The Marine Corps entry-level training must change to meet the challenge of producing a basically trained Marine rifleman who is prepared for service in the operating forces. The Marine Corps needs to reprioritize its training objectives for training recruits and to truly define what a basic-Marine rifleman is. Until corrected, these two facts will lessen the impact that recruit training is having on the Marine Corps success on the battlefield of the future.

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